



REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

UPDATE: Online Learning

2018

Authorizing legislation: RCW 28A.250.040

(<http://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=28A.250.040>)

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Executive Summary

Online learning continues to grow in Washington state.

Demographics of students who take part in online learning ranked the same as the 2015–16 school year. A significantly larger share of Black/African American students took an online course than the previous year. American Indian/Alaskan Native students kept their ranking as the most likely to access online learning. Asian students remain least likely.

English language learners (ELL), students in special education (SPED), and students eligible for free and reduced lunch (FRL) also showed growth, while staying consistent with their rankings. These students were less likely to take an online course than their non-group counterparts. The largest enrollment gap is between ELL students and students that did not qualify as ELL.

Measuring Success

Success is currently measured at the course level. The overall online course success rate improved to 81.5 percent in 2016–17 from 79 percent in 2015–16. By comparison, the success rate for non-online courses remained at 92 percent.

All student groups, except Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islanders, improved in online course success. ELL students, though the least likely to enroll in online courses, saw higher success rates online than in non-online courses.

Data Quality

Following up on the next steps identified in the 2016 report to the Legislature, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) worked on improving data reporting for online learning. The steps taken included:

- Increased guidance on reporting online courses.
- Collecting, for the first time, student-level course outcome data from approved online course providers.
- Identifying a need for reporting student data specific to approved online school programs.

Background

In 2009 the Washington State Legislature created an accountability system for online learning (SSB 5410, RCW 28A.250.005). The Legislature directed OSPI to develop an online provider approval system and report annually on the state of online learning in Washington (RCW 28A.250.040). The Legislature asked OSPI to include:

- student demographics,
- course enrollment data,
- aggregated student course completion and passing rates, and
- activities and outcomes of course and provider approval reviews.

This report provides information about online learning for the 2016–17 school year. Online learning is a delivery model for instruction. Depending on the structure, an online course may be delivered as a traditional course and schedule, or more commonly as one of three course models as an Alternative Learning Experience (ALE).

Definitions

“Online course” is defined in RCW 28A.250.010 as a course where:

- More than half of the course content is delivered electronically using the Internet or other computer-based methods;
- More than half of the teaching is conducted from a remote location through an online course learning management system or other online or electronic tools;
- A certificated teacher has the primary responsibility for the student's instructional interaction. Instructional interaction between the teacher and the student includes, but is not limited to, direct instruction, review of assignments, assessment, testing, progress monitoring, and educational facilitation; and
- Students have access to the teacher synchronously, asynchronously, or both.

“Online school program” is defined in RCW 28A.250.010 as “a school program that offers a sequential set of online courses or grade-level coursework that may be taken in a single school term or throughout the school year in a manner that could provide a full-time basic education program if so desired by the student” (RCW 28A.250.010).

“Online course providers” offer individual online courses (as defined above) and have the following characteristics:

- Online course providers must supply all of the following: course content, access to a learning management system, and online teachers.
- Online courses can be delivered to students at school as part of the regularly scheduled school day.
- Online courses can be delivered to students, in whole or in part, independently from a regular classroom schedule. Such courses must comply with RCW 28A.150.262 to qualify for state basic education funding as an ALE program.

This report uses the following terms:

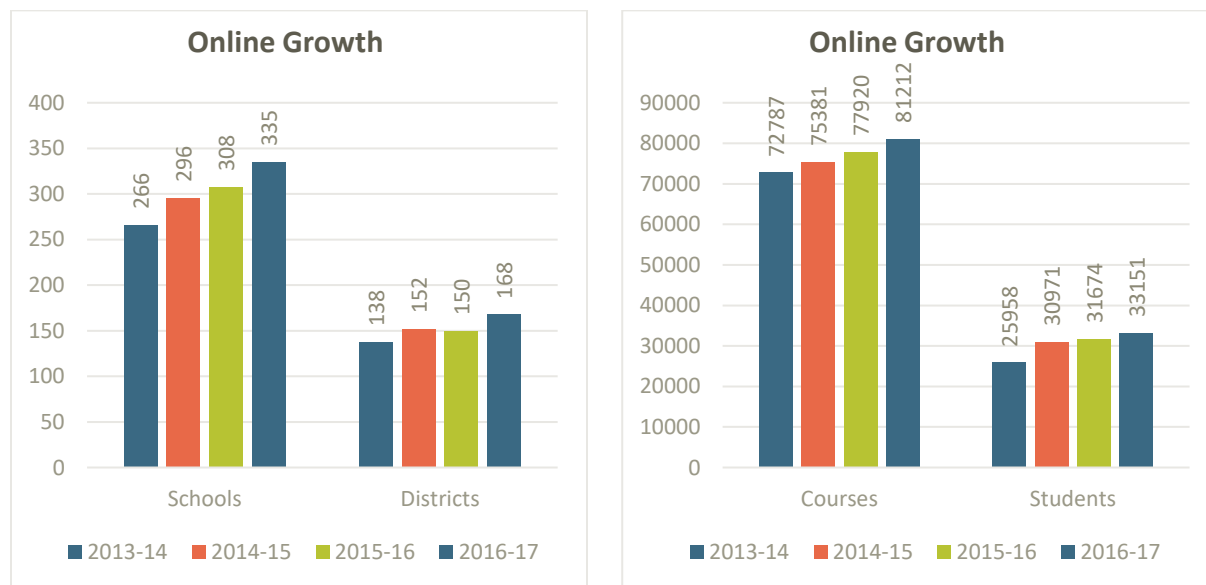
- “Headcount” measures each unique student served.
- A “course enrollment” refers to a single student enrolled in a single course for a single grading period. For example, a single high school student taking a full load of courses would have 10 (if the district offers five periods a day) or 12 course enrollments (if six periods are offered) for the school year.
- “Enrollment rate” refers to the percent of the student population enrolled in at least one online course.
- “Course Success Rate” is defined in WAC 392-502-010 as the percentage of online enrollments where the student earned one of the following grades for the course: A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, Pass, Credit, or Satisfactory. Courses marked E, F, No Pass, No Credit, Unsatisfactory, or Withdraw are not considered successful outcomes.

Update Status

Data used in this report are from the 2016–17 school year. The data were extracted from the Comprehensive Education Data and Research System (CEDARS) on September 28, 2017, unless otherwise noted.

Growth

Online learning continues to grow in Washington state. The following charts show the number of online courses reported, as well as the number of students, schools, and school districts reporting at least one online course enrollment.



Online Programs and Providers

During the 2016–17 school year, OSPI approved 26 single district and affiliate online school programs. There were two applications and one appeal submitted for the annual full approval review process. The review team denied these applications and appeal.

Data on approved online school programs and course providers is limited. In the spring of 2017, OSPI extracted CEDARS data about online enrollments. Analysis of CEDARS data showed that we do not have the reporting elements needed to tie online courses and students to approved online school programs or course providers. The Alternative Learning Department requested to add the needed data elements to be in place for the 2018–19 school year. The K–12 data governance board denied this request. The department will continue working with the K–12 data governance board to establish these elements, but likely will not have them in place until the 2019–20 school year.

In October 2017, OSPI collected student-level course data from all approved online course providers for the first time. This collection is not tied to CEDARS data. The results are currently being reviewed and will be used to evaluate the existing performance targets of online course providers set in WAC 392-502-030.

Demographics

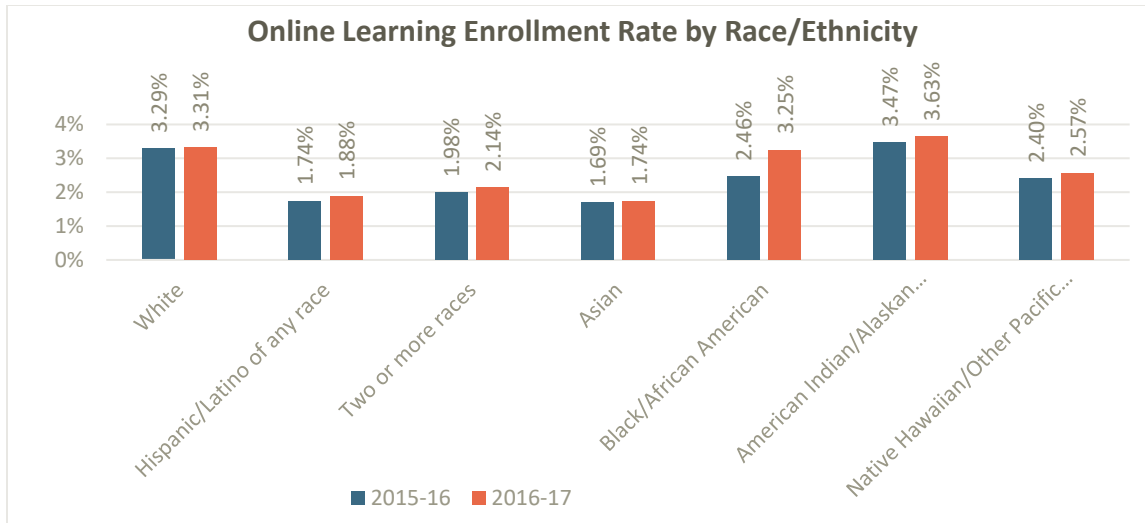
Overall headcount of student groups in online learning compared to their statewide headcount can be found as an appendix to this report. This report will focus on enrollment rates, or the percent of the entire group population that enrolls in an online course. This percent of the group is a more “Apples to apples” comparison than student numbers.

Gender

Enrollment rates by gender show that 3.04 percent of all girls participated in online learning, up from 2.9 percent from the year before. In comparison, only 2.55 percent of all boys participated, up slightly from 2.5 percent from the previous year.

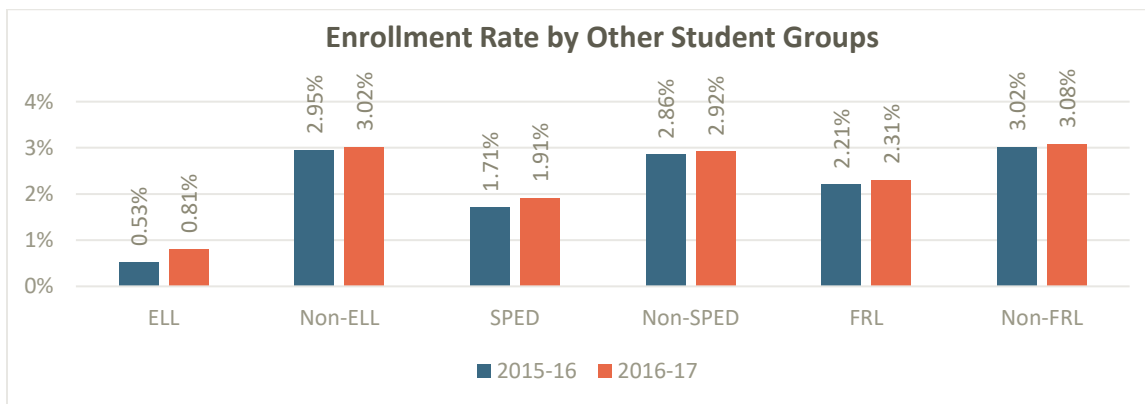
Race/Ethnicity

Enrollment rates by race/ethnicity show which groups are more likely or able to access online learning courses. The following charts show the percent of each student group who participated in at least one online course in the 2015–16 school year and in the 2016–17 school year.



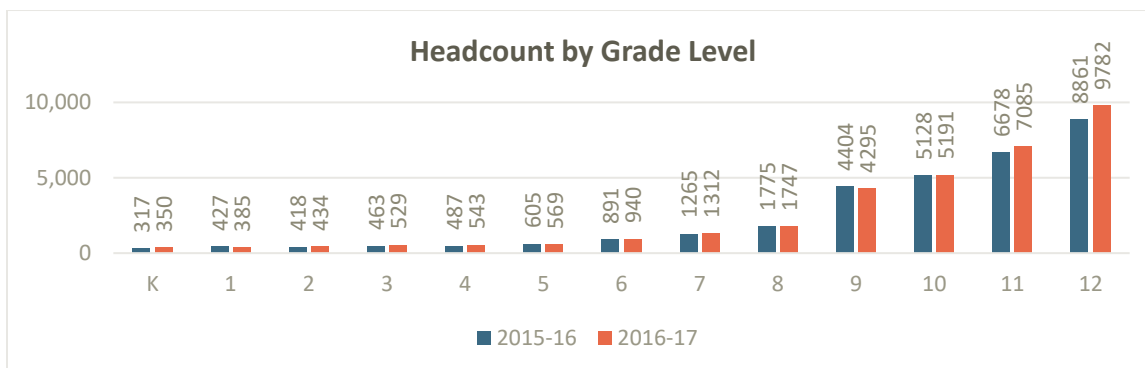
Other Student Groups

Other student groups listed are English language learners (ELL), as well as those who qualify for special education (SPED) and free and reduced lunch (FRL). These are shown in contrast to those students who did not qualify as part of each student group.



Grade Level

Headcount by grade level in K-10 are comparable to 2015-16 data. There is noticeable growth for students in grades 11 and 12.



Home-based

Home-based students may enroll in public schools part-time, while maintaining a declaration of intent to provide home-based instruction per RCW 28A.200.011(1). Of the overall 5,695 students reported as part-time home-based students, 9 percent (518) participated in online learning. This is the highest enrollment rate of any group. The 2016–17 enrollment rate is a decrease from the 13 percent reported in 2015–16.

Non-resident

Non-resident students are Washington students who have transferred completely to a public school district different from the one in which they reside, or their enrollment is split between districts to access courses or services not available in their resident district. These do not include students enrolled in charter schools or tribal compact schools.

A total headcount of 12,190 students are enrolled in at least one online course in a district other than their resident district.

Ninety-nine districts reported online enrollment of non-resident students, more than the 83 districts reported the previous year. Of these, only 13 reported 100 or more non-resident students. The top three districts account for 73 percent of the reported non-resident students. These top three are, from most non-resident students to least, Omak School District, Quillayute Valley School District, and Toppenish School District.

Measuring Success

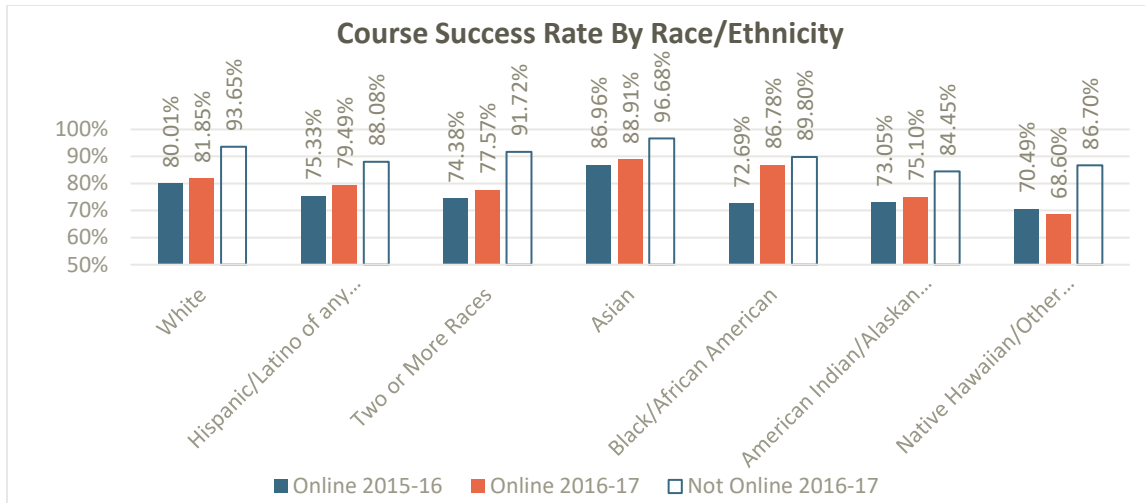
CEDARS provides data on course completions and grades through “student grade history.” Grade histories are only submitted for students in grades 9–12, so course-based achievement data is not available for students in grades K–8. Transfer credits are not included in this report. Transfer credits are often online courses taken outside of the standard school day or year. OSPI’s guidance and oversight of these types of courses is limited, so the quality of the data is limited as well.

Overall

Online courses had a course success rate of 81.5 percent. This is an improvement over the previous three years’ rate of 79 percent, 74.7 percent, and 75.1 percent. The course success rate for non-online courses remained at 92 percent in 2016–17.

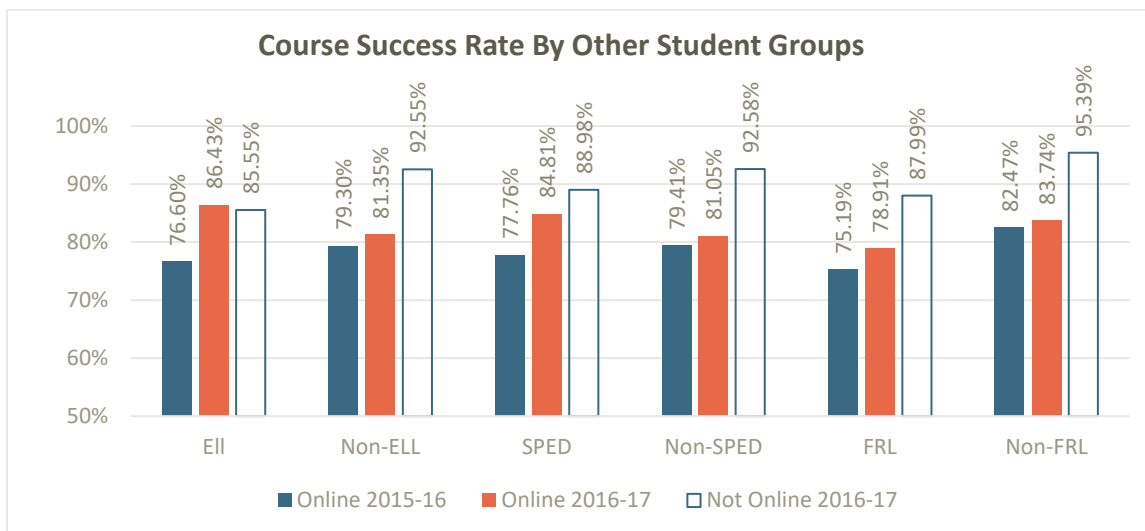
Race/Ethnicity

Students in online learning show the same race/ethnicity course success gaps as those found in non-online courses. Overall online course success also underperformed compared to non-online courses. Black/African American online students improved the most from the previous year, with the smallest gap between online and non-online success. The following chart shows the online course success rates by race/ethnicity for 2015–16 and 2016–17, as well as the one year non-online course success rate for the 2016–17 school year.



Other Student Groups

Students qualifying for services saw greater improvement year-to-year than their non-group peers. ELL and students qualifying for SPED both outperformed their non-group peers. ELL, while having the smallest online enrollment rate, had greater success in online courses than in non-online courses. The following chart shows the online course success rate by student group for 2015–16 and 2016–17, as well as the one year non-online course success rate for the 2016–17 school year.



Collaboration

The Online Learning Advisory Committee (OLAC) continues to be a resource for online learning. They are providing valuable input on the needs of students, teachers, parents, programs, and providers. Currently the group is advising on how OSPI is collecting information, and measuring the success of online learning. This committee is a valuable

resource. OSPI has identified a need to better utilize this committee to prioritize and support the needs of online learning.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Growth

Online learning continues to grow in courses, students, schools and districts across Washington state. Students benefit from online learning as a way to access school when there are barriers to the traditional schedule, and to access courses that the school may not be able to offer. Schools benefit by being able to offer and support courses that they may have trouble hiring qualified teachers for, or by providing advanced courses that would have limited enrollment. As schools adapt to the assorted needs of their students, online learning will continue to be an important element in public education.

Data Collection

Online learning data collection continues to improve. OSPI will continue to communicate data reporting expectations. As noted, OSPI, K-12 data governance, and OLAC will work to improve data collection on approved online programs and providers.

Data Use

From the data, OSPI is learning where the state is doing well, or improving, and is identifying gaps in accessibility and performance. Our next steps will be to identify districts, programs, and providers that are improving accessibility with equity and reducing the achievement gaps between identified student groups. This information will inform our communication and support of promising practices in an effort to improve online learning across the state.

This process to improve data collection and to use data to inform our cycle of improvement is part of our departmental effort to improve accountability and support for alternative learning experiences (ALE) and other non-traditional learning options. These options are all seeing growth as schools work to meet the needs of all students including those who struggle in the traditional setting, or need access to opportunities that districts may not have the teachers or student numbers to provide.

OSPI provides equal access to all programs and services without discrimination based on sex, race, creed, religion, color, national origin, age, honorably discharged veteran or military status, sexual orientation including gender expression or identity, the presence of any sensory, mental, or physical disability, or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal by a person with a disability. Questions and complaints of alleged discrimination should be directed to the Equity and Civil Rights Director at 360-725-6162 or P.O. Box 47200 Olympia, WA 98504-7200.

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Appendix A: Demographics

Group	Online Headcount	Statewide Headcount
All	33,151	1,190,707
Girl	17,446	574,471
Boy	15,706	616,236
White	21,691	654,632
Hispanic/Latino of any race	5,156	274,510
Two or more races	2,018	94,109
Asian	1,549	88,960
Black/African American	1,796	55,187
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	338	13,155
American Indian/Alaskan Native	635	17,479
ELL	1,097	135,577
Non-ELL	32,074	1,061,730
SPED	3,378	176,835
Non-SPED	29,778	1,018,709
FRL	13,105	566,020
Non-FRL	20,262	657,371
Part-time Homebased Instruction	518	5,695